



Select Board

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Select Board Meeting Minutes

March 4, 2020

6:00 PM: Open Meeting

Quorum present: Select Board Members: Bernie Fallon, Chair; Doane Perry, Eric Shimelonis and Town Administrator Marie Ryan.

Review and act on previous meeting minutes.

Review and sign warrants (payroll and vendor)

Motion (see attached motion) and voted on changing to new
Imagecast Voting Machines

Agenda Items/Action/Discussion Items: Meeting Opened at 6:04 PM

DPW Update – Curt Wilton

Curt handed an update report to the Board.

(see attached)

Curt told the Board that Mass DOT has sent the Town a letter in reference to plantings in front of the Solar Array next to the turnpike. He stated that they will be splitting the cost for this by doing the preparation but that the Town needed to pay for the plantings as well as the

maintenance of the plantings. The cost to the Town will be approximately \$11,500. He stated that the Town will need to budget for this.

Recap and Review of Fire Department

Bernie began by stating that at the last meeting he felt the community came together with a good positive discussion. He wanted to recap five important things:

1. The Fire Dept needs to increase their budget.
2. They need to add a training line to the budget.
3. He wants an organizational chart of names and qualifications for a strong dept.
4. He would like to see a five-year plan which Dan Buehler & Kathleen Kersey have started to work on with the Chief.
5. He would like to have the hydrant issues corrected.

Eric then stated that there was some productive discussion however, there were many inaccuracies after the last fire. He said that the other local chiefs told him that there were many concerns. Eric also mentioned that two chiefs actually asked to meet with Bernie to express their concerns. Eric then showed the Board an enlarged picture of the last fire about an hour after the fire started. This picture showed no water being put on the fire.

At this point someone in the audience spoke up that they should not discuss Peter without him in the room. The Board agreed and someone contacted Peter, who then attended the meeting at 6:35 PM.

Eric then continued his discussion in regards to the picture he had and how there was no water on the fire. Peter then stated that Richmond and Lee were doing it because he had trouble with his truck. Peter said there was constant water on the fire and that they never had an issue with running out of water. Eric then read the sheet with the timing of the events and which departments showed up when. Eric said that had the hydrants worked, they should have used them. A discussion continued in regards to what happened at the scene. Eric also mentioned that the other towns have taken West Stockbridge off of their alarm cards. Peter insisted that Great Barrington and Richmond have no issues with West Stockbridge. Eric said that they have no confidence in our department and that West Stockbridge is being isolated. Eric said he would not bring up the Ethics issue. He also stated that there has been an issue for years with no progress, no budget line for training still and that the Town needs to come back from the neglect and poor planning. Eric then stated that he saw nothing happening to improve the department so he decided to run for Select Board because he feels the Town needs to change faster then it has been to improve the safety.

Then Eric read the following motion:

I make a motion to place Fire Chief Peter Skorput on Administrative Leave effective immediately until further notice and to appoint Richmond Fire Chief Steve Traver to be acting Fire Chief for West Stockbridge on a temporary basis.

Doane then seconded the motion.

Peter then stated that he did training out of his overall budget and that the Ethics thing was mostly due to him not filing the proper paperwork. He said that he gave up and paid the fine because it would have cost more in lawyer fees to proceed with a hearing.

In regards to the last fire, he then said that he knew Richmond was coming so he did not need to lay the line down from the hydrant and that the report Eric had was not correct as far as the timing. Peter then stated what happened at the fire:

- Immediately he checked out the basement, opened door and then closed it and started putting water on the fire.
- Richmond showed up and started to put water on the fire.
- West Stockbridge truck got messed up then he opened the relief valve and it was fixed.
- Lee arrived and used the deck gun.

He then stated that this was an old house and was going to burn quickly. He said he has seen Chief Traver make mistakes as well and blamed Eric for putting the focus on him and that Eric quit on his own from the Fire Department. Peter also said that as far as his budget, people have fixed incomes and he doesn't want to increase taxes and spend money on things he doesn't need as well as the fact that he doesn't have the space for things.

Bid Opening at 7:02 PM - At this point, it was 7:02 PM and Bernie stopped the conversation because he needed to do a Bid Opening for Tree Pruning and Removal contract for the Town. He said they received two bids. One from Brush Hill Tree Service as well as John W. Field Tree Service. Curt will look over the bids and announce winner at next meeting.

Continued Fire Department Discussion –

Joe Roy asked Peter about the West Stockbridge Fire Department relationship with neighboring towns' departments. Peter stated that Great Barrington had no issues with them. Joe asked if the other chiefs had told Peter about any concerns they may have with the West Stockbridge Fire Department and Peter answered, "No". Another discussion continued in regards to the hydrants and whether or not they work, Peter said "yes, they do and we do test them". Bernie asked Peter if he is confident that there is always a water supply and Peter answered, "Yes".

Kardin asked Peter, "Why do the other departments not want to work with us? Why would they do that?" Eric said that the other departments no longer want to work with us because of risk. Peter responded to Kardin that they were manipulated into it.

Eric stated that he is just giving everyone the facts. He only wants what is best for the Town and that he has sacrificed some friendships over this issue but he wants to be honest and have truthful facts. He stated that we need to have a functional department with good relationships with other Chiefs. Eric feels the Town needs to move forward and not build the department with setting a low bar.

Jennifer Kilmer read a statement about her sons in the fire department and how important it is for them. Eric agreed this was an emotional, compelling letter but he is trying to help move the department forward and it is not a personal attack. He stated that the Select Board is the appointing authority and they look at each position they appoint. He said he is trying to help the Town have the best emergency services and it is not about himself or Peter. Eric said the Board may decide to have the last three fires get reviewed, not to put blame on anyone but to move forward with any issues. He then asked to move forward with the motion.

Peter stated he feels like Eric is attacking him and that there is nothing wrong with the Fire Department, they are doing their best. Peter said to Eric, "You want to get rid of me because we did not let you do what you wanted to do when you were in the department. I do as good as Traver, he makes mistakes too. We train with them. I have been doing this for a long time, 36 years and I always pay for training in my budget."

Doane told Peter that he disagreed even though he respects him, they are trying to improve the department and the town. Doane asked Curt Wilton if he had any answers. Curt said he makes sure he gets the best, most qualified people. Curt makes them all accountable and it is all about the process for the department to run the best it can. Curt also said that training is very important. The more you repeat things the better you get at it. Another important issue Curt said was paperwork. You need to log everything. Peter answered that they do train.

Eric said that he tried to show compassion but that he knows there are issues and if three towns don't want us to help, it is a real issue. Peter said that the MRI study was exaggerated and that he has done all the things they said in it. Doane stated he feels that we are dealing with risks and we all need to work together.

Roger Cavanaugh then asked the Board where they are with the motion on the table. Bernie then stated that they need to address the motion.

A new resident spoke up that he is not feeling very safe with this conversation and that he thinks this should not be about personalities. Peter asked what he needed to say to him to make him feel safe. The resident said he feels that the leadership should demand what they need from the Fire Department. They should create a policy or guideline to be followed for them to be successful. Eric said the Town did that previously but the process has been on going

for 4 years. He also stated that when the study came out, he said he could help and that today when the Finance Committee tried to help Peter with a 5-year plan, Peter only put some smaller equipment on that list. Eric said that they are only surviving and not improving.

Bernie asked Dan Buehler, Finance Committee member, how was Peter's 5-year plan when they meet. Dan responded that it was very skimpy, especially for someone under attack. He had no doubt that Peter's budget has been very minor every year and that we are under covered. Bernie called for a vote on the motion. He then stated that he wants the Board to be respectful and careful and to weigh the factors. He was concerned about the Fire Department as far as an organizational chart. He understands Peter has served the Town for many years but that there are many questions. Bernie also stated that he had a concern about the department blowing up and what would happen next.

Bernie then asked for the vote. Eric said, "I made the motion so I will vote". He then voted yes. Doane then voted yes and Bernie abstained. The vote was 2 for Administrative Leave so the motion passed. Peter then yelled, "I'm done" and he left the room and the fire fighters in attendance followed him.

Carol Kruller said that it is unfortunate that the Fire Department left with Peter because they serve the Town not the individual. She said it is important for the Town to base these issues on the facts not the personality. She said it takes courage to raise the issues and you need facts to be presented and the person who brings these up should not be attacked.

Liz Digrigoli asked the Board why they have Steve Traver, Richmond Fire Chief to be one to cover. Eric said that West Stockbridge has had a long-standing working relationship with Richmond and that this will only be a temporary measure. Then a discussion ensued in regards to the safety of the town now that Peter has been taken off of his duties. The Board stated that the Town will be covered for emergencies.

Steve Traver, Richmond Fire Chief arrived and answered any questions the audience had as far as the Town being covered for fires and emergencies. He stated that he had contacted all the neighboring towns of Great Barrington, Alford, Lee, Lenox and Stockbridge and that all those towns are willing to assist in covering different areas of West Stockbridge. Steve commented that there will be complete coverage and he would also notify the Sheriff's office as well.

Bernie stated that as far as what is next, we will move forward with where we are now and that the Board would meet again next week and give an update on any information that they can give out to the residents. Police Chief Marc Portieri also stated that he will have 24/7 coverage for the time being to assist as we work through this transition. Bernie said that he will summarize and give updates at the next meeting as well. Eric thanked his Board for having the difficult discussion and said that he will work hard to help build better services.

Bernie then made a motion to adjourn, Eric Seconded, all in favor.

The Select Board adjourned at 9:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Marie Y. Ryan

Marie Y. Ryan

Town Administrator

MOTION:

I make a motion to discontinue use of the Accuvote ballot scanning and tabulation equipment and to authorize the Town Clerk to begin use of the Imagecast scanning and tabulation equipment at the State Primary Election in September 2020 and all future elections after that including Local, Federal and State Primaries and Local, Federal and State Elections and all Special Elections, as long as the article to purchase said machine passes at the Annual Town Meeting in May 2020.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

3/4/20

HIGHWAY;

SNOW/ICE; Budget is currently operating at a deficit due to the rapid thawing of our gravel roads. 1,600 tons of various stone materials were spread over approx. 9-miles.

MAIN STREET TOPICS;

Crimson King, Norway Maple Trees (4-total); Peerless Tree Service has been selected to perform a rehabilitation of these trees. Hope is have this completed April/May 2020.

Proposal to include; *Selective pruning to remove dead and diseased wood
*light structural pruning of the interior canopy to help overcrowding
*remove all existing light strands that have choked and compromised their health.
*the existing turf will be removed from the critical root zone area and will be replaced with a 2"- 3" layer of shredded bark mulch to help hold moisture and increase root aeration.
*each tree will receive an application of a well balanced deep root liquid fertilization. This treatment will restore essential nutrients.
Est. Total \$ 2,650.00 (funded through FY20 Tree Warden Budget).

SOLAR ARRAY; (Stockbridge Road, rt.102)

*letter from MASS. DOT detailing a partnership to work together and share in the cost to install vegetation screening along the Solar Array. DOT will prep the area by installing fill and regarding. The Town has been asked to be responsible for the purchase and Planting of the trees (38-Dark American Arborvitae have been the agreed tree species for this site. Trimming and under brush control will fall under the Town's control per details of the permit.
Est. Total \$11,500 (per contract proposal Peerless Tree, 3/2/20).

BANNERS/FLAGS; Follow up on installing Banners or Flags on our utility poles along our Main Street corridor. I am in contact with our National Grid liaison Joanne DeRose. Still waiting for a response (FYI, this is not a new idea and has been done in the past. The last time we had asked it was not well received and told to erect all the banners/flags on our own Building fronts).

CEMETERY;

FY21 Budget is finalized. Finance meeting this Friday @ 1:00pm.

During our February 7th meeting it was discussed and voted to spend the rest of the FY20 Tree removal budget. Previously there were 9-trees that were bid out at the village

cemetery for their removal and it was voted and accepted to take the lowest bid of Brush Hill Tree Services to perform this task. On 2/26/20 3-large pine trees were removed. We will be entering into a new contract year for tree work to be performed through out Town. Bids will be opened tonight @ 7:00pm.

The Cemetery Commissioners have been meeting regularly and continue to meet (next meeting, 3/06/20).

*Items to be discussed and voted on:

Mowing Service Contract is up for renewal beginning July. We will be working on specs. Looking to have qualified Contractor pricing prior to the May Annual Town Meeting. Head Stone and Monument repairs. 2020 updated rates are in. We will begin repairs soon. Records (very poor and lack of records in all three cemeteries).

PARKS/RECREATION;

FY21 Budget is finalized. Finance meeting this Friday @ 1:00pm.

Committee would like to add a new member and are looking for the Select Board to appoint. Helen Nolan.

Parks and Recreation Committee meet the first Monday of every month. Next 4/6/20.

PLAY GROUND UPDATE:

The committee is working very hard and is committed to the Town's Play Ground area. The funding is in place and they will work within that allotment. Very soon the existing playground will be decommissioned and all the non-compliant pieces will be removed in preparation for the structure.

Hope to have it up and running this summer.

SOLID WASTE TRANSFER STATION;

FY21 Budget is finalized. Finance meeting this Friday @ 1:00pm.

The new bottles/cans 40-yard container has arrived. The new compactor unit is expected to arrive and installed this month. By crushing and compacting these recyclables there will be a cost savings on trucking fees by making these trips less frequent. We will know that savings within a few months.

This concludes my Monthly DPW Report.

Thank You,

Curt Wilton, Director

3/4/20